

FROM FIELD AND STUDY

Pied Imperial Pigeon and Red-tailed Black Cockatoo commuting to the Coronation Islands, Kimberley, Western Australia – The distribution of Pied Imperial Pigeon (*Ducula bicolor*) along the Western Australian coast is restricted to the north-west Kimberley, from Cape St Lambert to Secure Bay and offshore islands with semi-deciduous vine forests and other fruiting trees (Johnstone, R.E and Storr, G.M. 1998. *Handbook of Western Australian Birds*. Vol. 1: Western Australian Museum, Perth). In the Northern Territory and eastern Australia Pied Imperial Pigeon migrate to Papua New Guinea and Indonesia. However the Kimberley population is non-migratory – generally seen in ones, twos and small flocks of up to 30, although larger flocks of up to 250 have been reported (Coate, K. 2008 *Birds of Naturalists Island, Kimberley, Western Australia. The Western Australian Naturalist* Vol 26: 73–).

On 9 May 2008 at 6.30am, while anchored in Careening Bay aboard the charter vessel, *Flying Fish 5* (during an expedition with *Coates Wildlife Tours* along the Kimberley coast), our group noticed flocks of Pied Imperial Pigeon (numbering 3–30). They were flying over us to the mainland from the Coronation Islands, a distance of about 5kms. We counted to 251 before discovering the birds were landing and congregating at an exposed

seasonal freshwater seepage, located up from the shoreline near a small basalt cliff on the southern side of Careening Bay (15°06'30"S 125°00'21"E). We estimated 300–400 Pied Imperial Pigeon, either perched on rocks near the seepage waiting to drink or clustered further back on tree branches. After drinking, the birds appeared to rest a short time near the seepage before rejoining others further back. They then dispersed in small flocks inland and over a hill toward Rothsay Water. Only about 9 birds returned to the Coronation Islands, where there is little or no water.

There is little available information on the feeding patterns and movements of Pied Imperial Pigeon in the Kimberley. However the behaviour observed could indicate the pigeons were roosting at night on the islands, returning each day to the mainland for water and afterwards dispersing to find food at suitable areas along the coast. Two likely places are the nearby Rothsay Water and St George Basin, which have extensive areas of mangroves and semi-deciduous vine forests.

On 2 June 1993 I recorded a flock of at least 250 Pied Imperial Pigeon on the Coronation Islands, and on 5 June 1993 a similar size flock on St Andrew Island in St George Basin. This may have been the same flock.

On 26 May 2008, *Flying Fish 5*

again anchored overnight at Careening Bay. Although I was not on board, a fellow bird-watcher, Maurice O'Connor (also on the previous visit – 9 May 2008) recorded no more than 30 Pied Imperial Pigeon in the area, and no movement into Careening Bay from the Coronation Islands. This may have been due to the freshwater seepage having dried up. The only other freshwater in the area known to us, was a small spring fed pool surrounded by tall grass. It was beneath a dense canopy of trees on a creek situated several hundred metres inland from the main beach at Careening Bay. This had reduced considerably in the interim.

Pied Imperial Pigeon are not the only bird species to commute between the mainland and the Coronation Islands. On a number of occasions I have recorded Red-tailed Black Cockatoo (*Calyptorhynchus banksii*) doing likewise. Early on the morning of 15 July 1997, while anchored in Careening Bay aboard the *Sea Lion* (during a *Landscape Expedition* along the Kimberley coast) our group recorded many hundreds of Red-tailed Black Cockatoo flying from the mainland to the Coronation Islands. Three days later when anchored further up the coast at sunset, we received communication from another vessel, *Coral Princess*, informing us they were anchored in Careening Bay, and above them were hundreds of Red-tailed Black Cockatoo flying

from the Coronation Islands to the mainland. At the time we concluded there must have been a good source of food on the islands to warrant the birds making this flight each day.

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Migratory Little Friarbirds – In Western Australia the Little Friarbird (*Philemon citreogularis*) is restricted to the Kimberley Division. Little is known of its migratory habits. It is variously considered to be resident, nomadic or partly nomadic, fluctuating in numbers in response to flowering of food plants (Higgins *et al.* 2001. *Handbook of Australian, New Zealand and Antarctic Birds. Volume 5: Tyrant-flycatchers to Chats*. Oxford University Press, Melbourne).

On 8 May 2008 at 7.15am, while on an expedition with *Coates Wildlife Tours* along the Kimberley coast aboard the charter vessel, *Flying Fish 5*, I was in one of three accompanying dinghies (with 14 other passengers) observing a saltwater crocodile feeding on fish on the southern bank of the Prince Regent River (about 15°34'16"S 125°13'75"E). At this time I looked across to the northern bank about 600m away and noticed a large number of birds, which I identified as Little Friar-birds, following the course of the Prince Regent upstream in